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500 kilometres (312 miles) from its source downstream the Rhine river will have on its banks a new city quarter, the Zollhafen (Customs Port), which it once was. The plans call for a development on an area of 355'000 square metres (about 88 acres); so far, only the Kunsthalle (art gallery) Mainz – opened 2007 – has seen completion; it stands now on the grounds of the former boiler house of the Customs Port.

Well worth a visit, says

Oliver Schuster

1914 – 1918

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with cheers!

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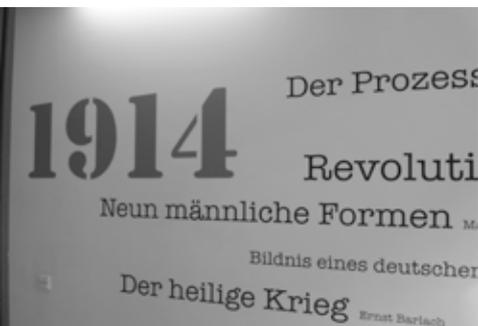


Recycling: Shell casings, gas masks, steel helmets and other items from two World Wars have been re-formed into non-military objects, by Thomas Hornbach, an artist residing in Mainz. In the background, on the wall, pictures of the wars' disasters by artist Tacita Dean.

To the Front with cheers!

A theatre in Vienna takes you on a journey at the war zone with food and beverages included

1914 – 1918 time table on the walls of the stair case of the Kunsthalle matching to the years works by contemporary artists, such as *The Process* by Franz Kafka.



With the beginning of the new year 2014 people all over the world quietly recall World War I which started one hundred years ago this year.

A Picknick at the Front – A Journey into No Man’s Land 1914 - 1918 would possibly the last thing what one wanted to undertake or think about.

in groups of four, each group provided with a picknick basket filled with sandwiches, wine in two big bottles – this is Vienna, after all –, soft drinks, fruits, snacks; china and silverware were also tucked into the wicker basket; all that included in the ticket price. From the entrance to the stage, right down the middle of the auditorium, led a kind of walk-



Invitation to a Picknick at the Front: Presentation of a collage about the »war to end all wars« – created by Bruno Max (Premiere 15 February 2014).

But, to watch the eponymous production at the SCALA THEATRE in Vienna was an enjoyment, albeit a bitter-tasting one.

The auditorium had been converted into something resembling a military camp; the walls decorated as dugouts and trenches; the floor covered with wood chips (set designer: Markus Ganser). There were no seat rows. At the entrance to the auditorium, one was welcomed by one or the other actor dressed as soldier in military gear, or as front nurse, etc., and guided to one’s place: bar stools

way, also covered with wood chips, in concept not unlike the *hanamichi* in a Japanese Kabuki theatre. The spectacle started. The actors presented a masterly put together collage of texts from official bulletins, newspaper articles, theatre plays, soldiers’ songs, poems, letters from the front, be it from friend or foe. The sandwiches and the wine still tasted well. Slowly, the mood changed from the cheerful to the sombre: after a soldier’s recital of his letter from the front, a uniformed official reads the notification to the family that the soldier

had just died a »hero's death«; haughtiness and callousness of front commanders in their discussions of strategy, on both sides; the degradation of the dead to mere statistical numbers. All this combined with the projections on the back of the stage of the desolate trenches, troops with their gas masks donned, the occasional sounds and smoke of explosions. One had to swallow harder and harder; one's appetite was gone. One

was awed by the horror of it all, unable to escape it; one couldn't shove it aside like a book that has become distasteful: No! one was compelled to watch the gripping presentations by the actors, sit through it, feel it on one's skin. Watching the final scene, a march of crippled soldiers leaving the stage down the centre walkway, one could sense in the metallic sounds of their artificial limbs that much greater horrors were yet to come. □



The war cripples after a lost picture by the German painter Otto Dix - clip from the video *ENTARTETE KUNST LEBT (Degenerate Art Lives)*, (2010) by Yael Bartane.

La Grande Guerre, the Great War, is the name the French still use for this war which started 1914 and, with the entry of the United States of America (enticing several other nations of the Western Hemisphere to join it) as an »Associated Power«, had become a world war.

That war, the bloodiest in history until then, is estimated to have resulted in 17 million death; the greater part of it at the fronts in Belgium and France. Additionally, millions of wounded, disfigured or mutilated soldiers returned to their home countries, to a life in misery. Not a few of them, blind or severely disabled, dragging themselves through city streets begging for alms, may have

wished to rather have died in battle.

Soldiers without bodily injuries but mentally gravely affected by their war experiences were often even more scaring to the populace, with their uncontrollable twitches, tremors and sudden breakdowns. Some of them were as helpless as small children. Such symptoms having never been encountered among that many before, army surgeons were stumped. Initially, the assumption was that the continual burst of exploding shells could have resulted in lesions of the brain. The terms »Bomb Shell Disease« and »Shell Shock« were coined in the English language; the French named soldiers suffering from it *victimes de l'obusite* (*obus* = shell, grenade). Still, many army surgeons con-

Memories - Thoughts

In memoriam
of my father's father:
whithout him
I would not be

* 9.9.1881
in Ladenburg
+ 23.2.1917
in Flabas near Verdun



sidered such soldiers skulkers trying to escape from the battlefield; some were summarily executed for reason of cowardice. Even after the war had ended, efforts to understand such symptoms were lacking and pejoratives thrown at these unfortunate such as *Schüttler* (shaker) or *Kriegszitterer* (war trembler) were common.

It was only in the aftermath of the Vietnam War and during the campaigns in Afghanistan that shell shock symptoms gained renewed attention among the medical profession. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) was entered as a type of illness in the international classification schedule of the World Health Organization (WHO).

In the coming four years there will be many solemn celebrations to commemorate the fallen of World War I;

some of them in front of monuments (often radiating pathos and glory) in small communities, some of them in military cemeteries installed at the places where one hundred years ago the battles once raged, mainly in the fields of Belgium and France.

After the war, Germans were not allowed to trespass on »foreign soils« to bury their dead soldiers; they had to leave that to the victors. These, however, had to express their deep hatred felt for Germany, the arch-enemy, and its soldiers, even after their deaths: crosses and markers erected on the graves of German soldiers in Belgium and France are black, the sign of evil; at all other military cemeteries, all around the world, crosses and markers on military graves are white. □

Les Gueules Cassées^{*)}

^{*)} word-for-word translation:
»Smashed Mugs«

World War I:
»Torn Apart Faces«.

Exhibition about the injured in battle at Kunsthalle Mainz

But the exhibition in the museum Kunsthalle Mainz is not devoted to the fallen but to those who survived the savageness of war: »Les Gueules Cassées – Scars of World War I in Contemporary Art«. In one of their explanations on the walls of the exhibition, curators (Markus Schinwald and Thomas D. Trummer, both from Austria) make passing reference to U.S. Army Headquarters in Europe in Wiesbaden, only a stone's throw away, and its military air field. One can read into that text that soldiers wounded in foreign campaigns are secretly ferried there for treatment



Lt. Will Dixon, 29, lost his leg in Afghanistan (photographer Bryan Adam)

at the military hospital, all that with tacit approval of Germany's Federal Government; perhaps, for the public to get a glimpse of soldiers with heavily wounded bodies might be more disturbing than watching the dead arrive in body bags.

Several of these soldiers are also shown, in 13 large-dimensional photos out of the book *WOUNDED: LEGACY OF WAR*, by Canadian rock star



*A medal for every finger lost ?
(photographer Bryan Adam)*

and photographer Bryan Adam. He took photos of British soldiers returned from Iraq and Afghanistan. Looking at those pictures needs a strong stomach to take but one asks oneself how much harder it must have been to the victims going through it, and still having to go through.

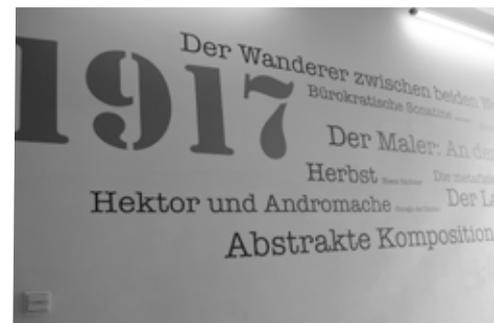
One is made much more aware of the horrors of war looking at pictures from military hospitals of soldiers with disfiguring wounds than

going over statistics of war deaths. During World War I, casts – also called *moulage* – were taken of injured faces, in wax or plaster, to document the extent of the trauma and as help for the surgeons how to proceed with reconstructive surgery. A selection of *moulanges*, done by Julian Zilp, a military surgeon on Germany's front with Russia, are lined up on one of the walls of the museum.

One has, however, doubts whether a man with his lower jaw lost, or a man with his nose cut off, possibly by shrapnel, were still alive at the time the casts were taken. Reconstructive surgery tried to do its best to provide a »normal« appearance again. One cannot help but think that the several »before and after« casts also displayed represent only successful cases. But once returned, most injured more likely than not would no longer venture outside of their living quarters.

There are, however, no reports that in Europe, people with face injuries put deep-reaching strawhats on which covered also their faces – a head dress used by victims with disfigured faces as a result of the atomic bombs dropped in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, to hide their hideous wounds.

A kind of movie of a puppet theatre play, *ZENO WRITING* (originally a contract work created 2001 for the exhibition *DOCUMENTA IX*) by the South African William Kentridge, is also shown. The title is a play on the title of Italo Svevo's novel *La coscienza di Zeno*. The story takes place in Trieste, at that time part of Austria-Hungary (now Italy), where some men-of-war of the fleet were stationed, and refers to the *irredenta* (annexion to Italy)



spirit of its mostly Italian-speaking inhabitants. In the movie, charcoal drawings are mixed with contemporary movie clips, texts written by invisible hands, and finally skeletal papercut puppets are in a dance macabre in fin-de-siècle palaces and in fields with machines that ultimately crush them; all that to the accompaniment of cheerful *bersaglieri* (Italian mountain troops) march music.

Furthermore, there is a short, impressive black-and-white movie by Yael Bartana, an Israeli multi-media artist. With purposefully blended-in visual noise, jerky movements in the animation, the sounds of the film projector itself, one gets the feeling of watching a movie taken one hundred years ago. Taking its inspiration from Otto Dix's picture *Kriegskrüppel* (war cripples) – original lost – Bartana starts with letting a few invalids jerkily march from right to left. More and more of them follow the first group until they stream in huge numbers across the screen, their artificial limbs clacking, their crutches dragging on the ground, the wheels of their primitive wheel chairs screeching, till at the end a bird's view shows their masses transforming into the writing ENTARTETE KUNST LEBT (Degenerate Art Lives). Otto Dix was later known, under the Nazi regime, as a »degenerate artist« whose works were asked to be destroyed.

Postscript

This writer observed a class of young students during their introduction to the exhibition, and then while they were strolling looking at the artefacts and displays. The teenagers appeared to be rather *blasé*, as



From the movie: Zeno Writing



At a loss...

...what to think of it. A class of young students at the Kunsthalle looking somewhat perplexed at a partition made out of jute bags created by Anne Schneider, an Austrian »installation artist«

if thinking: »So what? It's just ,art'!« Is it because video games can provide much greater and more gruesome »realism« than this exhibition's animated puppets, *moulages*, pictures of mutilated soldiers? But, as Erich

Maria Remarque, the German writer and veteran of World War I, says in his well-known anti-war novel **All Quiet on the Western Front:** »Only the military hospital shows us, what war is really about.« □

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